

### NEW RESEARCH: ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE IN UKRAINE

Ukraine's constitution gives all citizens the right to free of charge health care in state-owned and financed facilities, but new research highlights that many citizens cannot access health services and face high payments at the point of use.

Health is a vital national investment: a healthy population is essential for economic security, and inequalities in health are estimated to result in a 1.4% loss of GDP 1, or 19.9 billion hryvnia every year in the case of Ukraine. The situation requires urgent action.

This policy brief provides results from a nationally-representative household survey of 2,000 randomly selected people in 2010 from the Health in Times of Transition (HITT) study (<http://www.hitt-cis.net>). Further details on the research can be found in the source listed below.

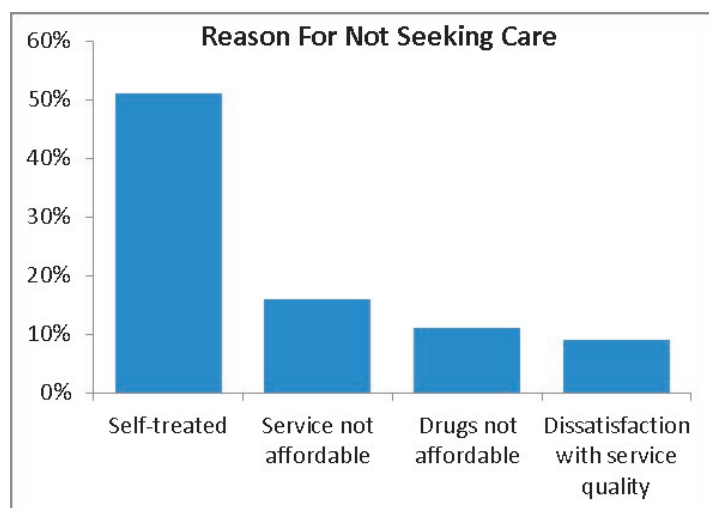
#### KEY STUDY FINDINGS

##### People do not access care when needed

More than half of respondents did not access health care when they experienced a problem serious enough to require medical attention in the past four weeks. Access to care is particularly poor in rural areas.

Half of respondents self treated instead of seeking care, which may be because home-based treatment is cheaper and therefore a substitute for health services.

Affordability of drugs and services were also common reasons for not seeking care.



##### People who access care face high payments

96% of respondents who had used health care in the past 4 weeks had made a payment for drugs or services. These high payments for health care are likely to place significant burden on household resources.

|                 | Respondents that accessed care |                         |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
|                 | Made a payment                 | Average cost of payment |
| Outpatient Care | 52%                            | 100 UAH                 |
| Inpatient Care  | 26%                            | 500 UAH                 |
| Drugs           | 81%                            | 150 UAH                 |

<sup>1</sup>Mackenbach JP, Meerding WJ, Kunst AE. (2007) *Economic implications of socioeconomic inequalities in health in the European Union*. Luxembourg, European Commission.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Pharmaceutical policy*

Further improvements are required to ensure that citizens of Ukraine are able to access medical drugs; this is crucial for disease control and drug resistance.

- Introduce systems to monitor the prices of pharmaceuticals
- Reduce variation between regions through more uniform regulation of drug prices
- Introduce a system of state reimbursement for medical drugs, focussing on vulnerable groups
- Promote rational prescribing through revised evidence-based clinical guidelines, and continuing medical education programs.
- Regulate perverse financial incentives for physicians, by preventing prescribers from earning money from the sales of medicines, and incentivising prescribing of generic drugs.

### *Provider payment reform*

To improve access to care, the financial barriers that encourage people to self-treat must be removed. Informal payments are known to be an important financial barrier in Ukraine, which should be addressed:

- Raise official salaries of health care workers
- Communicate clearly with the public about the price of services
- Revise the current method of paying providers, as salaried pay offers little incentive to improve efficiency. Pay should be linked to quality of work, through performance-related pay.

### SOURCE:

BALABANOVA, D., ROBERTS, B., RICHARDSON, E., HAERPFER, C. & MCKEE, M. 2011. Health Care Reform in the Former Soviet Union: Beyond the Transition. Health Services Research.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22092004>

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